

SONSHIP QUESTIONED

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“And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God.”
Matthew 4:3

IN speaking upon the temptation of our Lord, I want first to say a few words that ought always to be remembered by those who are tempted, lest they be surcharged with unnecessary sorrow. And to begin with, I remark that there is no sin in being tempted. Even when our first parents were in their perfect state, they were liable to temptation. The serpent came and beguiled them. It was not their fault that they were tempted—their sin was that they yielded to the temptation.

We know that our blessed Lord was personally without the slightest taint of sin—“holy, harmless, undefiled”—yet He was tempted by the arch-tempter himself, the prince and leader of all tempters, and He was tempted to what would have been the worst of sins. Still, there was no blame attached to Him on that account, for He did not yield to the assaults of the evil one.

So, dear friends, should you be tempted while you are about your lawful calling, or when you are in the house of God distinctly engaged in His service and worship, do not be surprised. Who are you that you should escape temptation when your Lord had to endure it? Do not be cast down by the fact of your being tempted, as though it were in itself a sin. The guilt lies with him who tempts, but not with the tempted one until he yields to the temptation. Let that ever be remembered.

And remember, next, that temptation does not necessitate sinning. It did not in the case of our Lord, for He “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin,” and that which was possible to Him, in His life on earth, can also be made possible to you by Him with whom all things are possible. A man need not fall into avarice because he is tempted to covetousness. A man need not become unchaste because he is tempted to lewdness.

Remember the case of Joseph—he was none the less pure because he was so foully tempted. A man need not be false to his convictions because someone tries to bribe him to be so—rather, he may prove the honesty and uprightness of his heart by recoiling from the very touch of the briber. He who is tempted need not therefore sin, for God who permits the temptation to come will, with the temptation, make a way of escape for him that he may be able to bear it.

A man may walk in the midst of a furnace of temptation, yet not even the smell of fire shall be upon him. He may be “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation” and kept as well amid the most furious temptations as if he lived in a region that was most helpful to his graces. A child of God may be specially, peculiarly, singularly, emphatically tempted, and yet he may be preserved from sin.

In the case before us, we see that our Lord was not only tempted, but that He was tempted of the devil, by him who has the greatest power and the most cunning sleight of hand of all tempters, and though the arch-tempter put before Him the subtlest of temptations, yet He did not yield in any respect whatever. So may you, dear friend, pass unharmed as it were between the very jaws of hell, preserved and upheld by the sovereign, omnipotent grace of God.

Note, yet again, that it may be necessary for you to be tempted. It evidently was so in the case of our Lord, for He did not fall into temptation through unwatchfulness. He did not go into temptation presumptuously, but we read of Him, that He was “led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted

of the devil,” so that He was in His right place—He was in the path of duty even when He had to go through this, His great threefold trial in the desert.

It was necessary that it should be so with Him that He might be made in all points like unto His brethren, that He might have full sympathy with us in all our temptations, and that He might make His life-work complete in every respect. Temptation may be necessary for us for the purpose of testing and trying us.

We read, in the Book of Genesis, “It came to pass after these things, that God did tempt (or, try) Abraham.” That is, God tested him, put his faith to a very severe test. There are no champions in God’s army who are mere fair-weather soldiers. They must all endure hardships, and their valor must be tried and proved.

God sends none of His ships to sea without having first tested them, and when their seaworthiness is proved, then they may go on their long voyages. You, tried believer, are to be tested, that the great Angel of the covenant may say to you, as He said to the father of the faithful, “Now I know that thou fearest God.” God does know this already through His omniscience, but He would know it practically by testing us and it is therefore needful that we should be tempted in order that we may be tested.

Temptation may also be necessary to us for our spiritual growth. Muscles are not developed except by exercise, and if we were to be, spiritually, put under a glass case and never suffered to endure temptation, we should become dwarfed and stunted, and some of our virtues would never be developed at all.

Where would our patience be if there were no suffering to test it? Where would be the grace of forgiveness if we never had to suffer injury from our fellows? It is for our growth in grace that the stormy winds of temptation are let loose upon us, that, like a stalwart oak, we may take firm root-hold. By this stern experience, Christian men grow “strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.” They sit loose to the world and they take a firmer grip on the invisible things of God, as they are tried and tempted by Satan.

It may also be necessary for us to be tempted to increase our usefulness. He that was never tempted cannot help those who are tempted. He lacks sympathy because he has never passed through the fiery trial to which they are exposed. Dear young man, it may be that you wonder why you have such a stormy inward life. Peradventure, God is going to make you greatly useful as a dispenser of comfort to others.

Men might be Boanerges, that is, sons of thunder, without trouble, but you could not be a Barnabas, a son of consolation, unless you had first known what it was to be comforted in time of trial. God might use you to scatter His seed with a hand that was never wounded, but He could not use you to bind up the broken in heart unless that hand had been rendered tender and sensitive by trial.

Your present experience, though painful, is a needful preparation for something which will give you tenfold joy—so you may endure the present trial even with cheerfulness because of the blessed result that will come from it.

Beside that, brethren, we must be tempted or else we cannot be victorious. The rule of the kingdom is—no battles, no crowns; no conflicts, no conquests. We must stand foot to foot in deadly combat with the arch-enemy of souls or else we can never have a memorial pillar set up by the wayside, like that one of which Mr. Bunyan speaks, where Christian met Apollyon and it was recorded of him,—

*“The man so bravely played the man,
He made the fiend to fly;
Of which a monument I stand,
The same to testify.”*

The great reason why God’s children are tempted is for God’s glory, for, when they stand fast and defeat the foe, then the strong man is overcome by a stronger, and then He that is the strongest of all—

the mighty Son of God—gets fresh crowns upon His head as one after the other the weakest among His people put to rout the great adversary.

There is a needs-be, then, that you should at times be “in heaviness through manifold temptations,” and though you may pray not to be led into temptation and are bound to do so, yet sometimes it may be of necessity that, like your Lord, you should be brought into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

Note, once more, that solitude will not prevent temptation. “Oh!” said a young man, “I think that I must give up my situation, for it involves me in so many temptations.” “Ah!” said a Christian woman, “I wish that I could get right away into some sisterhood where I should have no temptations.” Yes, and if you did as some foolish women have done, you would have your temptations greatly increased.

I am afraid that sometimes solitude is a help to temptation and that Christian people, who are much tormented by Satan, would do well to mix more often with other believers and tell out their sorrows. A good burst of tears and a narration of your grief to a sympathetic friend may be the best possible way for you to find relief from your sorrows. Do not be so shut up within yourself as to refuse to tell the heartfret that is wearing into your very soul—seek help from some Christian brother or sister, for we are bidden to bear one another’s burdens, and I trust we are not slow to do so.

Having thus introduced the general subject of temptation at rather unusual length, I want now to speak, with some brevity, but to practical purpose, concerning the temptation of our Lord.

The text I have taken shows that Satan is apt at writing prefaces. He is cunning and crafty, if not really wise. He does not come to the Savior and say at once, “Command that these stones be made bread,” but he begins thus, “If thou be the Son of God.” This is his old plan of insinuating doubts, by which Eve was vanquished in the Garden of Eden, and this is the sharp end of the wedge with which he thought to separate the Son of God from His Father.

And notice, too, that Satan knows how to fire a double-shotted gun, for, while he began by insinuating doubt—“If thou be the Son of God”—he linked it with rebellion—“Command that these stones be made bread.” Thus there were two temptations at the same moment. And sometimes, our mind is greatly perplexed and our heart is wounded by two attacks at one time, or one following very closely upon the heels of the other, and it is a part of Satan’s tactics to be quick with his temptations so that we scarcely recover from one blow before he deals another, and then another, that, if possible, he may drive us out of our wits and overcome us by his cunning.

I. Let us look closely into this double temptation with which he attacked the Savior. “If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.” And notice, first, that THE TEMPTER BEGINS BY ASSAILING THE SAVIOR WITH AN “IF.”

Note that *he does not begin with a point-blank denial*, saying, “Thou art not the Son of God,” but he suggests a doubt upon the point, “If thou be the Son of God.” At the present time, there is a spirit of infidelity creeping over the Christian church, and it puzzles and perplexes me to lay hold of it, because of its very vagueness.

Ministers and others of the modern-thought school do not positively assert that the Scriptures are not inspired, but they have a theory of inspiration which practically comes to that conclusion. They do not actually say that Jesus Christ is not the Son of God, but they try to explain away His Divinity in such a fashion that they might just as well deny it at once.

As for the Fall—oh, of course, there was a fall, but it was a matter of very small importance and the idea that the serpent tempted Eve is held up to positive ridicule as a myth, an ancient fable. The depravity of the human heart is admitted in words, but it is really denied when you come to see what those words actually mean.

There is a new theology lately sprung up, which has taken every pea out of the pod and every kernel out of the shell, and its advocates present us with the empty shucks and shells, and say, “Do not quarrel with us. We are all brethren and there is very little difference between what we hold and what you teach, only we are not so dogmatic and positive as you are.” Yet, all the while, they are throwing doubts upon

that which is our very life and we cannot help feeling that they have learned the devil's way of dealing with the truth—"If, if, if."

That is just how Satan comes to each believer. He will not positively say, "You are not a child of God," but he tries to inject a doubt into our minds, "If you are a son of God." He will not declare that Christ's people will certainly perish, but he asks, "Suppose they should?" Often, when I have heard a great many suppositions, I have felt more indignation at them than I have ever felt at a point-blank denial.

Somebody once said to Mr. Gough, "Now, Mr. Gough, suppose you were in a beer parlor." Mr. Gough said, "I will not allow you to suppose anything of the kind. With my convictions about the drink traffic, I will not have you suppose such a thing." And I do not know what better answer he could have given.

Yet people come to us with their supposings and insinuations, and we feel as indignant as Mr. Gough did. It is the devil's plan to assail with an "if" and we have met with many who have adopted his tactics. One says, "I am not an infidel. I am not a freethinker. Practically I am just the same as you are, I hold the same views, I subscribe to the same creed, I am in the same Union and Association." Yet, as we go on talking with him, he undermines the whole thing with some dreadful, dreary "if" concerning the faith which we hold dear.

Notice, next, that *the devil grafts his "if" upon a holy thing*. He says, "If thou be the Son of God." This is the very title that had been applied to Christ by His Father at His baptism, "This is my beloved Son." Yet Satan attacks it by trying to graft an "if" on it. Thus does the devil still seek to do with every precious truth and we must be ever on the watch against him as those who are not ignorant of his devices.

What a blessed stock is that glorious doctrine of the adoption of believers into God's family, but with an "if" grafted upon it, what sour grapes it bears! It is with great joy we sing,—

*"Behold what wondrous grace
The Father hath bestow'd
On sinners of a mortal race,
To call them sons of God!"*

But put an "if" on it and then, ah, me! All the joy and all the wonder vanish at once.

Moreover, on this occasion, Satan put an "if" upon a plain utterance of God. The Father had said, "This is my beloved Son," yet this impudent fiend dares, in the face of God's Only-begotten, to quote that title with an "if" added to it. I am never afraid of what any text of Scripture may teach, but I am often afraid of the gloss that has been put on a text. And this Satanic glossing is the most mischievous of all mischiefs.

It matters not how plainly any truth may be revealed in the Scriptures, nor how clear is the language in which it is stated, so that we can see that it is certainly taught to us by God. Yet the devil will come and put an "if" on it. I suppose that some of us who have been Christians for many years have had to fight over every doctrine in the Word of God. There is scarcely one truth I believe for which I have not had to contend in my own soul.

David said that he rejoiced over God's Word "as one that finds great spoil." Now, spoil is found after a battle and God's truth is to most of His people a thing for which they have had to fight with the powers of darkness and they have had to take the doctrine from the enemy by main force through the aid of the Holy Spirit.

"Shall the prey be taken from the mighty?" No, that which has been gained in battle by such soul-conflict as we have had, shall be held fast till we die. Yet, while we say this, we know that Satan has the impertinence to come and write over many of the great truths of Scripture his ugly, insinuating "if."

Ay, and not only does he put an “if” on Scripture, but *he puts an “if” also on past manifestations*. You enjoyed, some time ago, a blessed visit from God. You thought that you never could forget it—you said that you would never doubt again. The sacred Dove rested upon you and you were full of holy calm. The voice and witness of the Spirit were within you and you knew that you were a child of God and that you lived in JEHOVAH’s love.

But the devil will come and say to you, “All that was fancy and excitement. There was nothing in it.” Or if he is not so positive, he questions it with an “if.” With his great black pen, he scrawls “if” right across all our sweet experiences—all the tops of Tabor—all the communion tables where we have met our Lord, all the places of secret retirement where our soul has been made like the chariots of Amminadib. And then, unless our Lord comes to our help, we lose the comfort of these past manifestations.

In this case, *the devil puts an “if” across nearly the whole of Christ’s life*. Our Lord had already had thirty years of retirement and preparation for His public ministry. I do not know whether Satan had tempted Him while He was in His obscurity, living with His father and mother in quiet, and one would think that after thirty years of holy retirement, there must be a certainty of His being the Son of God.

Yet Satan has a brazen forehead and he says “if” even to Him, after all that. Some of us have been more than thirty years in God’s ways. Some, perhaps, for fifty years have enjoyed the Lord’s presence and blessing, yet Satan will come and say, “If—if thou be a son of God.” Ay, and he has whispered that insinuation in the ears of dying saints whose faces have begun to glow with the glory to be revealed. He has persecuted them with his cruel “ifs,” even to the last moment.

Do not be astonished at it, beloved, for our Lord Jesus Christ had no sin in Him—He had never done anything that should have made His sonship questionable, and yet, with a perfectly pure and holy and consecrated life before Him, this arch-enemy dares to sneer at it and to spit upon it one of his abominable “ifs.” “If thou be the Son of God.”

There was our divine Master, fully assured that He was the Son of God. His unerring consciousness told Him that He was so. He knew it, He was sure of it, as sure of it as He was of His own existence, and yet the fiend dared to say to Him, “If thou be the Son of God.” And you, beloved, may feel the pulsings of the heavenly life—your heart may beat high with immortality—yet the hiss of the old serpent may be heard in your spirit, “If you are a son of God.” That is his usual mode of attack, so be on your guard against it.

II. But now, secondly, notice that THE TEMPTER AIMS THE “IF” AT A VERY VITAL PART, “If thou be the Son of God.”

In like manner, with his poisoned arrow of an “if,” he will attack a child of God, sometimes, with *doubts as to whether Christ is God*. “If He be the Son of God.” Oh, but that doctrine of the Godhead of our Savior is a thing which we must be prepared to defend even with our life if necessary—we can never give up that great truth.

It has been assailed all through the history of the Christian church. The devil has seemed to say to his fiendish archers, “Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the King of Israel.” If he can get men to deny the Godhead of Christ, he knows that the chief truth is assailed. If that were gone, there would be nothing left that would be worth having.

When he has not assailed the Godhead of Christ, he has often attacked *our sonship*. “Oh,” says he, “are *you* a child of God? *You*, with all your imperfections and infirmities—are *you* a child of God?” And he puts it to you, over and over again, as a matter of question, until at last you are driven almost out of your wits. This questioning of Satan is always with an evil intention. He knows that he is assailing us in a very vital place—he is attacking our faith and faith is vital to a Christian. If faith should fail us, then our life has failed us.

He also, by this means, attacks *our childlike spirit*, for, if we are not children of God, why should we submit to His will? Why should we not kick and struggle against our daily trials? If we are childlike, we trust, we obey, we believe, we endure, we persevere, but he puts an “if” on all that and so he tries to disarm us.

Moreover, he is here *aiming at our Father's honor*, for he as much as says, "Is He your Father? If He be your Father, why does He allow you to be tried as you are? Why are you so poor? Why are you so ill? Why are you so depressed in spirit? He does not act towards you as if He were your Father." Thus the devil tries to take from us all our comfort and all our delight, for if God be not the Father of us who believe, then are we orphans indeed.

We are strangers in this land and we have no other land to go to if God is not our Father and heaven is not our home. The world has rejected us and if God does not own us, we are of all men most miserable. So, Satan attacks us with that "if" in the tenderest place, where he can most wound us. If he could succeed in his assault, he would indeed leave us naked, and poor, and miserable.

He would prevent our prayers, and destroy our patience, and hinder us in every respect. And he does this that he may then make room in our hearts for any other form of temptation that he likes. Once doubt your sonship and you will get commanding stones to be made bread or doing something like it. If you are not a child of God and God will not take care of you, then something whispers to you, "Take care of yourself. Rob your fellow men. Do a dishonest thing, do something or other by which you can escape from your present difficulty."

This is what Satan is aiming at—therefore, my brothers and sisters, I earnestly entreat you to look well to this vulnerable part—your faith—your firm conviction of your sonship in relation to the Most High.

III. Thirdly, SATAN SUPPORTS HIS "IF" WITH OUR CIRCUMSTANCES.

I will dwell only a minute or two upon this point. I think that the devil seemed to say to Christ, as he looked round the desert and saw that there was not a disciple or friend or anybody about—no guards to take care of this Prince of the blood—"You, the Son of God, alone, deserted, forsaken, in a wilderness? You, the Son of God?"

And sometimes, he has come upon us *when we have been all alone*. We have looked and there was no man to help us. We had to war a warfare all by ourselves. Friends were all gone—some were dead, others had proved false—and then he said, "You, a child of God? Why, He would have given His angels charge concerning you if you had been one of His children, He would not have left you all alone like this."

And then Satan, with a glance of his cruel eye all around us, has seemed to say, "*You are in the desert*. There is nothing but sand and stones—no food to eat, no water to drink, no shrubs or trees to shelter you. This is a pretty place for a child of God! Why, surely, if you had been one of His children, you would have been in a paradise. Was not that where God put Adam? How can you be a son of God and be in a desert?"

Has he never said something like this to you, beloved? "You have had trials all around you. Losses, crosses, bereavements, afflictions, poverty—nothing but troubles and nobody to help you out of them." And you have echoed the devil's words, "Alone and in a desert." And then the question has come, "Can I be a child of God?"

Our Lord was also *with the wild beasts* and I have no doubt that Satan pointed them out to Him, and said, "You, the Son of God, along with lions and bears and leopards and wolves?" So, sometimes, you have gone out into what has been a desert to you and all day long you have been among wild beasts. When you have been at work, you have not heard a word to comfort or cheer you, but you have been surrounded by blasphemers and filthy talkers. You have said, "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar." The misery of your surroundings has gone right home to your heart and then the devil has said, "You, a child of God, and put into such a position as this?"

Then, last of all, we read that *Jesus hungered*, and after forty days fasting, well He might—and hunger is a hard thing to overcome. It bites and gnaws most terribly. It was then that the devil said to Him, "If thou be the Son of God," and threw a sardonic sneer into it—"a hungry Son of God!" So, you see, Satan backs up his insinuations by appealing to the circumstances in which we are found.

And I will put it to you now, whether there is anybody here—even the very bravest of us—who could endure such temptation as this. Suppose you had to go out of that door, tonight, with ragged garments upon you, without a single penny in your pocket, without a solitary friend left, and no place where you could lay your head?

Do you not think that it is very likely that you would begin to be afraid that, after all, you were not a child of God? Supposing that you had eaten nothing all this day, and for many days before, and you were faint and weary, and no man gave you anything—if the devil said to you then, “If you are a child of God,” I am afraid that you would say, “Ah, Satan, now that it has come to this pass, I am afraid that I am not!”

Or I will put it in another way. If there should knock at your door tonight a man without shoes on his feet, one who had nowhere to sleep, and was all in rags, and he told you that he had not broken his fast for days, would you believe that he was one of your brethren in Christ and that he was a child of God? Well, perhaps, *you* might, but I know a good many who would not and they would say, “No, no, no. You are an impostor and if you do not leave, I will call in a policeman.”

Do you see, then, what pith and force there is in the temptation when, finding the Savior without a place to lay His head, hungering, alone, with the wild beasts, and in a wilderness, the devil comes to Him and says, “Are you, indeed, the Son of God?” It was only the true Son of God who could answer him with confidence when in such a plight as that.

IV. To close my discourse, let me remind you that IF THE TEMPTER CAN BE OVERCOME, IT WILL BE EXCEEDINGLY HELPFUL TO US ALL THE REST OF OUR LIFE.

For, first, note that, *if an “if” about our being a child of God comes from the devil, it is as good as a certificate.* “Oh!” say you, “how is that?” Why, the devil never puts an “if” to anything that is not true. Whenever he says “if” to a thing, we may be sure that it is true. If he comes along and finds a text of Scripture and says, “If it is true,” that is the best homage which he can pay to it by trying to undermine it.

I believe that your sonship is true when the devil tells you that it is not. If you were not a son of God, the devil would not be likely to utter any “if” about it. I hope I am not in any sense a servant of the devil and whenever I see anyone in my congregation who is puffed up with carnal conceit, and who thinks that he is a child of God, I say to myself, “I will try to preach, next Sunday, in such a way as to make him question whether he is or is not a Christian, for he ought most seriously to question it.”

It is true, as Cowper says,—

*“He that never doubted of his state,
He may perhaps—perhaps he may—too late.”*

It is no part of the devil’s work to make the self-deceived and hypocrites question themselves—he rather lulls them into deeper slumber. But when he does suggest to any man the doubt, “If thou be a son of God,” you may depend upon it that the man is a son of God, or else the devil would never think it worth his while to raise a question about it. So you may take Satan’s insinuation for a certificate of your sonship.

When you are once able to battle with his evil suggestion, you may say, “If I were Satan’s own, he would not worry me. If I belonged to him, he would try to make me content in his service and these doubts and fears, these questions, this self-examination, these great searching of heart are all evidences that I have escaped from the talons of the old dragon, and that he worries me because he cannot devour me.” How we get a confirmation of our sonship even from Satan himself.

Then, dear friends, *if you once overcome that “if” thoroughly, it is very likely that it will not occur to you again for many a day,* for, as far as I know, our blessed Lord had not that “if” put to Him any more for years. The devil departed and angels came and ministered unto Him, and He spoke with a holy confidence and joy in His Father’s love all the rest of His life.

At the last, when He was in a still worse plight, and His hands were nailed to the cross, and He was faint with thirst and near to death, then cruel men stood round Him and repeated the Satanic insinuation, "If thou be the Son of God." Oh, but our blessed Master must have inwardly smiled as He thought, "You cannot tempt Me with that 'if'—I have been tempted, long ago, by a far greater adversary than any of you, even by your master and lord, the arch-fiend himself. In the wilderness, he said to Me, 'If thou be the Son of God,' and I repulsed him and turned the edge of his sword upon himself. And now you have only tried to pierce me with a blunted weapon—you cannot wound Me as you cry, 'If thou be the Son of God.'"

Do you not see, brethren, that a temptation overcome may be used, the next time, to overcome another one? You may lay up this conquered temptation, just as David laid up Goliath's sword, and one of these days, when you come the same way and need a sword, you will say, "There is none like it. Give it to me." And you will be glad to get the old sword into your hand again.

So, temptations vanquished may be of service to us even on our dying bed. And as our Master triumphed on the cross over a temptation which He had defeated in the desert, so, when we come to die, we may have peace and joy because of those early trials in which we were enabled to overcome our great adversary by the blood of the Lamb.

I have been all this while talking to God's children about the "if." Yet I fear that I am addressing some to whom the devil will not say "if," for he knows, and perhaps your own conscience knows, that you are not a child of God. O dear friends, do not deceive yourselves about this matter! If you are not His children, do not pretend that you are, but remember that if you are not the children of God, you are children of the evil one and heirs of wrath, even as others.

Oh, may infinite mercy adopt you into the family of God! And the way that mercy works is by leading you to trust in Christ crucified. Then you shall be put among the children—adopted into the Lord's family—yea, born into it by a new birth through faith in Jesus Christ. The Lord grant it to every unconverted one here and grant it now, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

MATTHEW 3:13-17 AND 4:1-11

Matthew 3:13-14. *Then came Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbade him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?*

Who among us would not have felt as John did? Shall the servant baptize the Master and such a Master, even his Lord and Savior? But mark the condescension of our blessed Lord. He would do everything that He wished His people afterwards to do and therefore He would be baptized and set the example that He would have them all follow.

15. *And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered Him.*

We are never to be so modest as to become disobedient to Christ's commands. We have known some who have allowed their humility to grow alone in the garden of their heart without the other sweet flowers that should have sprung up side by side with it—and thus their very humility has developed into a kind of pride. John was easily persuaded to do what his feelings at first seemed to forbid. "Then he suffered him."

16-17. *And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*

It has also happened unto the servants of Christ, as well as to their Master, that in keeping the commandments of God there has been a sweet attestation borne by the Holy Spirit. I trust that we, too, according to our measure of sonship, have heard in our hearts the voice from heaven, saying, "This is

My beloved son,” and that we have experienced the descending of the dove-like Spirit, bringing us peace of mind and gentleness of nature.

Matthew 4:1. *Then was Jesus led up by the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.*

What a change it seems from the descent of the Holy Spirit to being led up into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil! Dear friends, be especially on the watch after a great spiritual joy, for it is just then that you may have some terrible temptation. Perhaps the voice from heaven is to prepare you to do battle with the enemy.

I have noticed that the Lord has two special seasons of blessing His people—sometimes, before a great trial, to prepare them for it, and at other times, after a great affliction, to remove the weakness which has been thereby occasioned. Think not that you can come up out of the waters of baptism and then live without watchfulness. Imagine not, because the Spirit has sealed you and borne witness with your spirit that you are the Lord’s child, that therefore you are out of gunshot of the enemy.

Oh, no! At that very time, he will be preparing his most subtle temptations for you, just as Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil immediately after His baptism and His Father’s testimony, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

2. *And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred.*

I suppose that He was not “an hungred” during His long fast and this renders it a fast altogether by itself. We are here told, “He was afterward an hungred.”

3. *And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.*

“You can do it if You are indeed the Son of God. You are hungry, therefore feed Yourself. Your Father has forgotten You, His providence has failed You. Be Your own providence—work a miracle for Yourself.” How little the tempter, with all his knowledge, understood the true character of Christ! Our Lord never worked a miracle in order to supply His own needs.

4. *But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*

He had been attacked as a man who was hungering, so He quoted a text which evidently belonged to man, “Man shall not live by bread alone.” It was a wilderness text. It concerned the children of Israel in the desert, so it was suitable to the position of our Lord in that wilderness. He meant to let the tempter know that as God fed man by manna from the skies once, He could do it again. At any rate, this glorious Man, this true Son of God, was determined not to interfere with the ordinary working of providence, but He left Himself and His needs in His Father’s hands.

5-6. *Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.*

“It is written.” Thus the devil tried to turn Christ’s own sword against Himself—that two-edged sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. And the devil can still quote Scripture to suit his own purpose. Yet it was a misquotation as to the letter of it, for he left out the essential words, “to keep thee in all thy ways.” And it was a worse misquotation as to the spirit of it, for in the true meaning of the passage there is nothing to tempt us to presumption. There is a guarantee of safety when we are walking where we should walk, but not in leaping from a temple’s pinnacle down into the abyss.

7. *Jesus said to him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*

Here was a plain, positive precept, which clearly forbade Christ to tempt God by such a presumptuous action as casting Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. And we must always follow the precepts of Scripture whatever the tempter may say.

8. *Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;*

Notice that these temptations were in high places. Alas! high places are often full of trial, whether they are places of wealth and rank, or of eminent service in the church of God. A pinnacle is a dangerous position, even if it is a pinnacle of the temple. And the summit of an exceeding high mountain is a perilous place even if the view from it is not the poverty of the city, nor the sin of the people, but the glory of the kingdoms of the world. Even with such a view as that, the mountain's brow is full of danger to our weak heads.

9. *And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.*

Why, they were Christ's already! They never belonged to Satan, and though for a while he had to some extent usurped authority over them, it was like his impudence to offer to give away what was not his own.

10. *Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*

Let the bribe be what it may, you must not worship or serve either yourself or the devil. Your God alone claims your homage, and if the whole earth might be yours through one act of sin, you would not be justified in committing it.

11. *Then the devil leaveth him, and behold, angels came and ministered unto him.*

What a change! When the devil goes, the angels come. Perhaps some of you are just now sorely tempted and much troubled. Oh, that you might speedily come to Mahanaim, of which we read, "And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him"—that there you might be met by troops of angels come to minister to you, weary with the conflict with the evil one, just as they ministered to your Lord! You need them as much as He did, and therefore you are as sure to have them if you look up to Him, and ask Him to send them to you.

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